

Meeting the Challenge of Juvenile Bird ID



Juvenile plumage



“Immature” plumages

- Term is very broad/inclusive
- Basically can include every plumage from fledgling up until they become full adult
- In some cases the term “immature” might just apply for the first year (or months):



- In other birds like gulls or eagles the “immature” term might apply for several years:





Juvenile



**Ring-billed
Gull**



1st winter
(immature)

First plumage - natal down



Indigo Bunting



Eastern Phoebe

“nestling” (either in downy or juvenile plumage)



“fledgling” (typically juvenile plumage)





Eastern Phoebe – nestlings







Chipping Sparrow – juvenile

Chipping Sparrow – first basic (fall/winter) plumage



Song Sparrow – juvenile





Song Sparrow – juvenile and adult



Swamp Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow – juvenile



Grasshopper Sparrow juvenile



Henslow's Sparrow
juvenile







Nick Anich

Vesper Sparrow – juvenile

Jenny Wenzel

Yellow-rumped Warbler juvenile





Yellow-rumped Warbler - first basic (fall/winter)





Common Yellowthroat – juvenile



Common Yellowthroat – molting
from juvenile to first basic







American Redstart – juvenile

David Franzen



American Redstart – juvenile



American Redstart – first basic (fall/winter)



Ovenbird - juvenile





Only one warbler with white tail spots across
center of tail – Magnolia



Magnolia Warbler – first basic (fall/winter)



Only one warbler
has extensive
yellow tail spots –
Yellow Warbler





Yellow Warbler – juvenile



Yellow Warbler – first basic (fall/winter)



Rose-breasted
Grosbeak – juvenile





Rose-breasted Grosbeak – first basic (fall/winter)

Rose-breasted Grosbeak –
immature male (left) &
female (right)





Horned Lark – juvenile



Some juveniles are fairly straightforward – color patterns are very much like adults





House Wren – juvenile



Black-capped Chickadee – juvenile



Gray Catbird – juvenile



Barn Swallow – juvenile



Cedar Waxwing – juvenile





Eastern Kingbird – juvenile



Brown Thrasher – juvenile



Eastern Bluebird – juvenile



Jeff Galligan



Wood Thrush – juvenile



Blue Jay – juvenile



Ryan Brady

American Crow – juvenile





Scott Diehl

Common Nighthawk



Great Crested Flycatcher



Ryan Brady

Golden-crowned Kinglet



Red-winged Blackbird



Baltimore Oriole



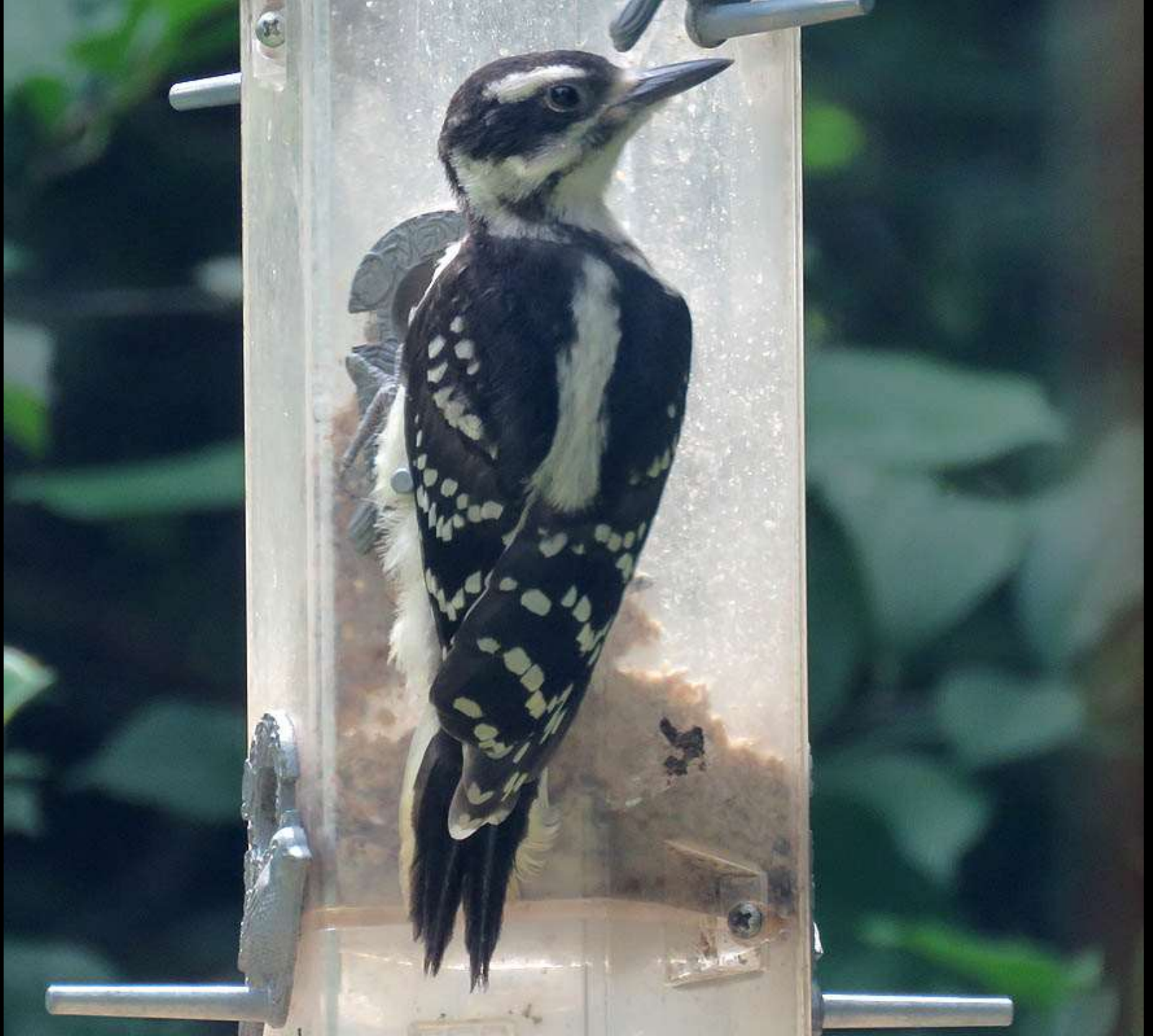
Downy Woodpecker – juvenile male



Downy Woodpecker – juvenile female



Hairy Woodpecker – juvenile male



Mourning Dove



Precocial birds – attain downy plumage while in egg



Killdeer hatchling – downy young, attains first basic plumage by about 17 days



Wild Turkey



Wild Turkey (young roost in trees by 2 weeks)



Wood Ducks



Sandhill Crane family

Chipping Sparrow



Chipping Sparrow – juvenile



Chipping Sparrow – immature







Dark-eyed Junco



Eastern Towhee



Brown-headed Cowbird – juvenile



Brown-headed Cowbird juvenile
with foster parent Chipping Sparrow



Brown-headed Cowbird juvenile
with foster parent American Redstart



David Franzen

Black-billed
Cuckoo –
juvenile
with adult



David Franzen



Black-billed Cuckoo – juvenile



Black-billed Cuckoo – immature



Yellow-billed Cuckoo - juvenile



Yellow-billed Cuckoo – immature



So, the bottom line is...

If you see a juvenile bird that you don't recognize, be very patient and wait and watch it for a while.

One of its parents will likely come to feed it before long!





Ryan Brady

Nashville Warbler



Ryan Brady

American Redstart



Applicable codes from the WBBA II handbook:

FL **Recently Fledged Young:** Recently fledged young or downy young. This includes dependent young only. Be cautious of species that range widely soon after fledgling. One of the best features to look for is the length of the tail feathers – if shorter than the adults, the young probably originated locally. Young cowbirds begging for food confirm both the cowbird and the host species.

FY **Feeding Young:** Adult bird feeding recently fledged young that are not yet independent. This code should not be used for species that may move many miles from the nest site, such as raptors and terns.

Obviously, these codes are a judgment call. (What does “recently fledged mean?)

Look for clues of immaturity such as:

- Tufts of down anywhere on the body.
- Short tail feathers – not yet fully grown.
- Not yet capable of strong flight.
- Fleshy gape
- Appearance of loose or fluffy plumage.
- Streaks on underparts that may not be present later = juvenile.



Questions or comments?